

# **Food Waste and You -**

## **Small steps towards extending the shelf life of your food**

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Solarpunk HR 2025.05 - How can I...

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# Why Food Waste Matters

- In 2022, **1.05 billion tonnes** of food was wasted globally, equivalent to **19% of all food available to consumers** ([UNEP Food Waste Index Report 2024](#))
- Households contributed **60% of this waste**, with each person wasting about **79 kg annually** ([AP News](#))
- Food loss and waste account for **8–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions** ([UNFCCC](#))
- The **economic cost** of global food waste is over **\$1 trillion per year** ([The Guardian](#))

# Why Food Waste Matters

## THE STUDY FOUND THE FOLLOWING:



Food waste was **62% by mass** of total household waste, significantly more than the fractions for packaging and residual waste fractions.



**No correlation** was found between income group and per capita food waste generation.



Median per capita food waste generation was **77 kg/capita/year**

### FOOD WASTE CATEGORIES (% BY MASS) WERE:

Fruit and vegetables:

**62%**



Meat:

**11%**



Dairy:

**11%**



Bakery:

**16%**



### EDIBLE AND INEDIBLE FRACTIONS WERE:

Edible

**39%**



Inedible

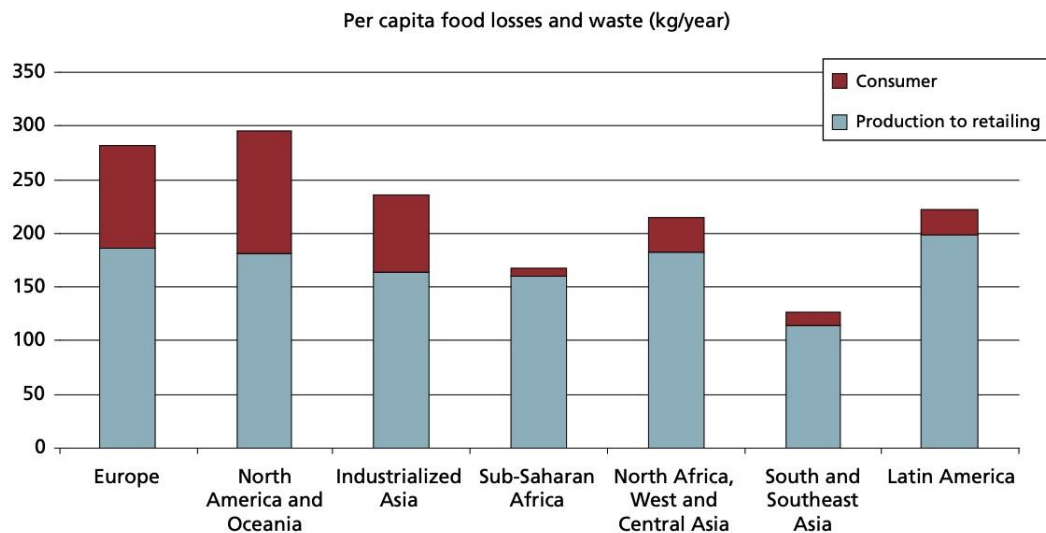
**61%**



Inedible fruit and vegetables were the largest fraction, at **81%** of all fruit and vegetable waste generated or **73%** of all inedible food waste.

# Why Food Waste Matters

**Figure 2. Per capita food losses and waste, at consumption and pre-consumptions stages, in different regions**



# The Good News

- **The Power of Small Changes**
- Adopting just a few new habits can reduce your food waste by **30% or more**
- The average European household wastes **€250 - €600** of edible food each year ([EU Commission](#)) - reducing waste saves real money
- Less waste helps combat **climate change, deforestation, and water scarcity**
- *Are you greewashing me?* No. This is a hopeful movement, not a blame game - it's about making **informed choices and influencing** around you -

# Why We Waste Food

- Overbuying due to lack of planning or impulse purchases
  - *Guilty as charged!*
- Improper storage shortens food shelf life
  - “Keep in a cool and dark place”
- Misunderstanding of expiration labels leads to premature disposal
  - More on this later
- Cooking more than necessary or not using leftovers
  - Did you ever get a “NO!” on “Can you pack this to go?”

# Let's get practical - Smarter Food Storage

- Fridge zones:
  - top (ready-to-eat)
  - middle (dairy)
  - bottom (raw meat)
  - drawers (veg & fruit)
- Ethylene gas: apples, bananas, and avocados emit it
  - use for ripening avocados or kiwi
  - keep away from sensitive produce like leafy greens, broccoli, zucchini...

# Let's get practical - Smarter Food Storage

- Use clear containers and label leftovers to improve visibility and reduce "forgotten food"
- Improve visibility of soon-to-spoil items by placing them at the front of shelves
- Experiment with reheating
- Freezing is an effective way to pause spoilage - most foods freeze well if stored correctly.
  - don't freeze cooked tubers and roots
  - freeze fresh veggies pre-cut and portioned for easier use - broccoli florets in a zip bag is my favorite!
  - *bonus*: blush frozen, store bought veggies are often better, fresher and more nutritious!



# Let's get practical - Portioning & Planning

- Create loose meal plans: flexible ideas help use what you already have.
  - For example, plan a few core meals for the week - like a stir-fry, soup, or pasta dish - and adapt them based on what's already in your fridge or pantry.
- Cook intentionally: make what you'll eat, or batch cook with a plan to freeze or share
- Reuse leftovers creatively
  - stir-fries, soups, grain bowls, wraps, omelets, casseroles, quesadillas, stuffings, savory pies, sandwich fillings, fried rice, pasta salads, or just blended into dips and spreads

# Let's get practical - Expiration Labels

- Shelf life varies dramatically by product and storage method
- Common misconception: discarding food immediately after the "best by" date
- "Best by" ("najbolje upotrijebiti do")
  - quality indicator, not a safety cutoff. In Croatian labeling, this phrase suggests when the product is at its **best quality**, but it is usually still **safe to consume after the date** if stored properly.
  - Still can be sold legally after the Best by date!
- "Use by" ("upotrijebiti do")
  - a strict safety-related label, used for perishable items like meat, dairy, and fish. After this date, the food may no longer be safe to eat, and selling it is not permitted under EU and Croatian law ([EU Regulation No 1169/2011](#)).

# Let's get practical - Expiration Labels

- Improperly stored fish goes bad even before the “Use by” date
- Properly stored eggs can last weeks beyond their labeled date
- Many packaged dry goods remain safe and edible months beyond expiration if kept dry and sealed
  - Cheese is just spoiled milk anyway, right? :D
- Trust your senses - if it looks, smells, and tastes fine, it's usually still good
  - Dry edges, a brown squishy dot on a na apple?
  - Careful - mould is different!
- When was this item produced? Can they pinpoint a date when it goes bad 3 months in the future? In exactly two years?

# A Culture of Sharing & Reducing Stigma:

- Share surplus food with neighbors, friends, colleagues
- Organize or contribute to food swaps, pantry shares, or community potlucks
- Lead by example - Be visibly involved in sharing initiatives
- Frame it as mutual aid, not charity - Everyone gives and receives
- Use inclusive language - Say "shared meals" instead of "leftovers"
- Normalize sharing through storytelling - Share real-life positive experiences

# Destigmatizing Food Sharing in the Office

- Create a “Community Fridge” or Shared Pantry
  - Designate a fridge shelf or pantry space where employees can leave extra food items, snacks, or leftovers for anyone to take.
- Encourage everyone to contribute and take food without judgment.
  - Have managers and leaders openly participate and share their own food to normalize the behavior.
- Host Regular Food Swap Days (team building)
  - Organize monthly or quarterly food swap events where employees bring homemade meals, baked goods, or surplus items to exchange.
- Provide Easy Access and Hygiene Assurance
  - Provide clear guidelines on food safety, labeling shared food with dates and ingredients.
  - Offer containers, napkins, and hand sanitizer nearby to make sharing hygienic and appealing.







# My stories

- That time we went to Greece and the waiter served us leftover food from the other table after people left - just because we asked for it!
- That time we went to the market late in the day and got a basket of figs, then went home and made jam!
- That time we went to pumpkin days and salvaged a bunch of “decoration” hokkaido pumpkins - we had frozen soup/risotto/pasta starter for months!



**Do you have some stories to share?**